# ENSLAVED
## AND OTHER POEMS

JOHN MASEFIELD

Ella Dunn.

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ENSLAVED

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# ENSLAVED

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD
AUTHOR OF "REYNARD THE FOX"
"THE EVERLASTING MERCY"
ETC.

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TO

LEWIS

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# ENSLAVED

ALL early in the April when daylight comes at five
I went into the garden most glad to be alive
The thrushes and the blackbirds were singing in the thorn
The April flowers were singing for joy of being born.

I smelt the dewy morning come blowing through the woods
Where all the wilding cherries do toss their snowy snoods
I thought of the running water where sweet white violets grow
I said, "I'll pick them for her, because she loves them so."

So in the dewy morning I turned to climb the hill
Beside the running water whose tongue is never still,
O delicate green and dewy were all the budding trees
The blue dog-violets grew there and many primroses.

Out of the wood I wandered, but paused upon the heath
To watch, beyond the tree tops, the wrinkled sea beneath
Its blueness and its stillness were trembling as it lay
In the old un-autumned beauty that never goes away.

And the beauty of the water brought my love into my mind
Because all sweet love is beauty and the loved thing turns to kind
And I thought, "It is a beauty spread, for setting of your grace,
O white violet of a woman with the April in your face."

So I gathered the white violets where young men pick them still,
And I turned to cross the woodland to her house beneath the hill,
And I thought of her delight in the flowers that I brought her,
Bright like sunlight, sweet like singing, cool like running of the water.

Now I noticed as I crossed the wood towards my lady's house,
That wisps of smoke were blowing blue in the young green of the boughs:
But I thought, "They're burning weeds," and I felt the green and blue
To be lovely, so, together, while the green was in its dew.

Then I smelt the smell of burning; but I thought, "The bonfire takes,
And the tongues of flame are licking up below the lifting flakes."
Though, I thought, "the fire must be big, to raise a smoke so thick."
And I wondered for a moment if the fire were a rick.

But the love that sang within me made me put the thought away,
What do young men care for trouble if they see their love to-day,
And my thought kept running forward till it knelt before my sweet,
Laying thought and joy and service in a love-gift at her feet.

And I thought of life beside her, and of all our days together,
Stormy days, perhaps, of courage, with our faces to the weather,
Never any days, but happy, so I thought, if passed with her.
Then the smoke came blowing thickly till it made the wood a blur.

Still, I did not think of evil, for one could not, living there.
But I said, "The rooks are startled," for their crying filled the air,
And I wondered, in the meadow, why the cows were not at grass,
Only smoke, down-blowing, bitter, that the birds were loath to pass.

So I quickened through the meadow to the close that hid the home
And the smoke drove down in volleys, lifted up, and wreathed and clomb,
And I could not see, because of it, and what one cannot see
Holds the fear that lives in darkness, so that fear began in me.

And the place was like a death-house save for cawings overhead,
All the cocks and hens were silent and the dogs were like the dead,
Nothing but the smoke seemed living, thick, and hiding whence it came,
Bitter with the change of burning, hot upon the cheek from flame.

Then my fear became a terror and I knew that ill had fallen
From the fate that comes unthought of when the unheard
word is callen,
So I flung the little gate astray and burst the bushes through
Little red-white blossoms flecked me and my face was dashed
with dew.

Then I saw what ill had fallen, for the house had burned to
death,
Though it gleamed with running fire when a falling gave a
breath,
All the roof was sky, the lead dripped, all the empty windows wide
Spouted smoke, and all was silent, save the volleying rooks
that cried.

This I saw. I rocked with anguish at the flicking heap that
glowed.
She was dead among the ashes that the lead drops did
corrode.
She was dead, that gave a meaning to the beauty of the
spring,
Yet the daffodils still nodded and the blackbirds still did
sing.

When the stunning passed, I stumbled to the house's westward side
Thinking there to find some neighbour that could tell me
how she died;
Fearing, too, lest Death the devil who had dealt such murder there
Should be hiding there behind me for to clutch me unaware.

There was no one there alive, but my leaping heart was stilled
By the sight of bodies lying in the grass where they were killed.
Drooped into the grass they lay there, pressing close into the ground
As the dead do, in the grasses; all my world went spinning round.

Then I saw, that with the bodies, all the ground was heaped and strown
With the litter of a house that had been gutted to the bone;
Split and hingeless coffers yawning, linen drooped like people dead,
Trinkets broken for their jewels, barrels staved, and crusts of bread.

Then a mess of feathers blowing, then the cattle's heads, and then
Stunned at all this wreck I hurried to the bodies of the men.
Five were workers of the household, lying dead in her defence;
Roused from sleep, perhaps, in darkness so that death might dash them thence.

But the other three were strangers, swarthy, bearded, hook-nosed, lean,
Wearing white (for night surprisal) over seamen's coats of green;
Moorish-coloured men, still greedy for the prize they died to snatch;
Clutching broken knives, or grass-blades, or some tatters of their catch.

Then I moaned aloud, for then I knew the truth, that these
Were the Moorish pirate raiders who had come there from the seas,
Come upon my love defenceless, by surprise, and I not there.
Come to burn or kill her beauty or to drag her to their lair.

"Dragged away to be a slave," I thought. I saw what she had seen,
All the good friends lying slaughtered in the young grass dewy green;
All the cattle killed for provant and the gutted homestead burning,
And the skinny Moors to drag her to the death of no returning.

Minutes passed, yet still I stood there, when I heard one call my name,
Amys, once my darling's woman, from her hiding-corner came,
"O," she cried, "They came upon us when the light was growing gray
And they sacked and burned and slaughtered, and they've carried her away.

"I was sleeping in the cottage when I heard the noise of men,
And the shots; and I could see them, for the house was blazing then.
They were like to devils, killing, so I hid, and then I heard
Rollo moaning in the bushes with a face as white as curd.

"He was dying from a bullet, but he said 'Saffee. Saffee
Pirates, Amys; they were burning and they shot and murdered me.
Amys, look where I was murdered, look, they blew away my side,
And they burnt the cows in stable.' Then he moaned until he died.

"It was terrible to hear them kill the beasts and pack their prey.
Then they shouldered up their plunder and they sang and marched away;
And they took my lady with them as a slave-girl to be sold.
I saw them kill Paloma, they said that she was old.

"Then they went on board their cruiser and she sailed away at once.
Look there, beyond the beaches, you see her where she runs runs —"

* * * * * * *

I saw a peaked sail pointing and feathering oars that flasht
In the blueness of the water that was whitened where they gasht.

* * * * * * *

There they carried my beloved in a pirate ship at sea
To be sold like meat for killing in the markets of Saffee.
Some fire-shrivelled oak-leaves blew lightly past my face,
A beam fell in the ruins, the fire roared a space.

I walked down to the water, my heart was torn in two
For the anguish of her future and the nothing I could do.
The ship had leaned a little as she snouted to the spray;
The feathering oars flashed steadily at taking her away.

I took a fisher's boat there was and dragged her down the sand,
I set her sail and took an oar and thrust her from the land,
I headed for the pirate, and the brown weed waved beneath
And the boat trod down the bubbles of the bone between her teeth.

I brought them down the land-wind so from the first I gained;
I set a tiny topsail that bowed her till she strained.
My mind was with my darling aboard that ship of fear
In cabin close with curtains where Moormen watched my dear.

Now when they saw me coming they wondered what it meant,
This young man in a fish-boat who followed where they went.
They judged that I was coming to buy the woman free;
So suddenly the oars stopped, they waited on the sea.

I dropped my sail close to them and ranged to easy hail,
Her plunges shivered wrinklings along her spilling sail,
The water running by her had made her shine like gold,
The oar blades poised in order kissed water when she rolled.

A hundred naked rowers stared down their oars at me
With all the bitter hatred the slave has for the free.
The boatswain walked above them, he mocked me, so did they:
The sun had burnt their bodies and yet their look was gray.

So there we rocked together, while she, at every roll,
Moaned from her guns with creakings that shook her to the soul;
I did not see my darling; she lay in ward below
Down in the green hung cabin she first joined hands with woe.

The galley plowtered, troubling; the mockings of the slaves
Passed from bench to bench, like bird's cries, her bow-beak slapt the waves,
Then her captain came on deck, quick and hard, with snapping force,
And a kind of cringe of terror stiffened down those banks of oars.

The captain walked the deck; he eyed me for a moment,
He called some Turkish words with a muttered added comment,
Then he called, "Well. What d'ye want?" in the lingua of the sea.
The boatswain leaned and spoke, then they sneered and looked at me.

So I stood upon the thwart, and I called, "I want to come
To be comrade to the woman whom you've dragged away
from home.
Since I cannot set her free, I want only to be near her."
"Ah," he said, "Men buy love dear, but by God you buy
it dearer.

"Well; you shall;" he spoke in Moorish and a seaman
tossed a cord,
So I hove myself alongside, scrambled up and climbed
aboard.
All were silent, but they watched me; all those eyes above
the oars
Stared, and all their bitter tushes gnashed beneath them like
a boar's!

At an order, all the oars clanked aft, and checked, and
sliced the sea,
The rowers' lips twitched upward, the sheets tugged to be
free,
The wrinklings in the sail ran up as it rounded to a breast,
The ship bowed to a billow and snouted through the crest.

My boat was tossed behind us, she bowed and swung away.
The captain stood and mocked me, "Well, since you would,
you may.
You shall be near your lady, until we fetch to port."
They chained me to the oar-loom upon the after-thwart.

All day, until the twilight, I swung upon the oar;
Above the dropping taffrail I sometimes saw the shore,
Behind me swung the rowers, again and yet again
A gasp, a clank of rollocks and then a cry of pain.

The boatswain walked above us to lash us if we slackened;
With blood of many beatings the rowers' backs were blackened,
Again and yet again came the lash and then the cry,
Then a mutter for revenge would run round the ship and die.

But twilight with her planet that brings quiet to the tired,
Bringing dusk upon the water brought the gift that I desired
For they brought my well-beloved to the deck to breathe the air,
Not a half an oar's length from me, so we spoke together there.

"You," she said; "Yes, I, beloved, to be near you over sea.
I have come to be beside you and to help to set you free.
Keep your courage and be certain that the God who took will give.
God will dawn and we shall prosper for the living soul will live."

Then they bade me stop my talking and to use my breath to row.
Darkness came upon the water and they took my love below.
Fire in the oar-stirred water swirled in streaks that raced away;
Toppling up and down the taffrail touched the red sky and the gray.

Then the wind began to freshen till the shrouds were twanging sharp,
Thrilling an unchanging honing like a madman with a harp,
Thrilling on a rising water that was hissing as it rose
To be foamed asunder by us as we struck it down with blows.

Soon we could not row, but rested with the oar blades
triced above,
Then my soul went from my body to give comfort to my
love,
Though indeed the only comfort that my mind could find
to say
Was, that God, who makes to-morrow makes it better than
to-day.

So I yearned towards my darling while I drooped upon my
bench.
All the galley's length was shaken when the mainsail gave
a wrench;
Always when I roused, the taffrail toppled up to touch the
stars,
And the roaring seas ran hissing, and the planks whined,
and the spars.

Day by day I rowed the galley, night by night I saw the
Pole
Sinking lower in the northward to the sorrow of my soul,
Yet at night I saw my darling when she came on deck to
walk,
And our thoughts passt to each other though they would
not let us talk.

Till early on a morning before the dawn had come
Some foreign birds came crying with strong wings wagging
home.
Then on the wind a warmness, a sweetness as of cloves,
Blew faintly in the darkness from spice and orange groves.

Then, as they set us rowing, the sun rose over land
That seemed a mist of forest above a gleam of sand.
White houses glittered on it, the pirates cheered to see.
By noon we reached the haven, we anchored in Saffee.

They cloaked my well-beloved and carried her ashore
She slipped a paper to me while brushing past my oar.
I took it, muttering "Courage"; I read it when I dared:
"They mean me for the Khalif. I have to be prepared."

They led her up the jetty, she passed out of my sight.
Then they knocked away our irons and worked us till the night,
Unbending sails, unstepping masts, clean-scraping banks, unshipping oars
Rousing casks and loot and cables from the orlop into stores.

When all the gear was warehoused, they marched us up the street,
All sand it was, where dogs lay, that sprang and snapped our feet,
Then lancers came at gallop, they knocked us to the side,
They struck us with their lance-staves to make them room to ride.

Then, as we cleared the roadway, with clatter, riding hard,
With foam flung from the bit-cups, there came the body-guard,
Then splendid in his scarlet the Khalif's self went by
A grand young bird of rapine with a hawk-look in his eye.

A slave said, "There's the Khalif. He's riding north to-
night,
To Marrakesh, the vineyard, his garden of delight.
That means a night of quiet to us poor dogs who row,
The guards will take their pleasure and we shall rest below."

Then, in the dusk, they marched us to the quarries of the
slaves
Which were dripping shafts in limestone giving passage
into caves.
There they left us with our rations to the night that pri-
soners know
Longing after what was happy far away and long ago.

* * * * * * *

Now often, as I rowed upon the bench,
In tugging back the oar-loom in the stroke,
A rower opposite whose face was French
Had signalled to me, with a cheer or joke,
Grinning askant, and tossing back his hair
To shew his white, keen features debonair.

And now that I was sitting on the stone,
He came to where I sat, and sat beside.
"So," he exclaimed, "you eat your heart alone.
I did, at first; but prison kills the pride.
It kills the heart, and all it has to give
Is, hatred, daunted by the will to live.

" I was a courtier in the French King's court
Three years ago; you would not think it now,
To see me rower in a pirate port
Rusting my chain with sweatings from my brow.
But I was once Duhamel, over sea,
And should be still, if they would ransom me.

" I honour you for coming as you did
To save your lady. It was nobly done.
They took her for the Khalif; she is hid
There in the woman's palace; but, my son,
You will not look upon her face again.
Best face the fact, whatever be the pain.

" No, do not speak, for she is lost forever,
Hidden in that dark palace of the King.
Not all the loving in the world would ever
Bring word to her, or help, or anything.
She will be pasture to the King's desires,
Then sold, or given in barter, when he tires.

" A woman in the Khalif's house is dead
To all the world forever; that is truth:
And you (most gallantly) have put your head
Into the trap. Till you have done with youth,
You will be slave, in prison or at sea.
Sickness or death alone will set you free."

"Surely," I said, "since people have escaped
From worser hells than this, I, too, might try.
Fate, that is given to all men partly shaped,
Is man's, to alter daily till he die.
I mean to try to save her. Things which men
Mean with their might, succeed, as this will then."

I saw him look about him with alarm.
"O, not so loud," he said, "for there are spies."
His look of tension passed, he caught my arm,
"I think none heard," he said, " but oh be wise
Slaves have been ganched upon the hooks for less.
This place has devilries men cannot guess.

" But no man, ever, has escaped from here.
To talk of it is death; your friend and you
Are slaves for life, and after many a year,
(At best) when you are both too old to do
The work of slaves, you may be flung abroad,
To beg for broken victuals in the road."

I saw that what he said was certainty.
I knew it, even then, but answered, "Well.
I will at least be near her till I die,
And Life is change, and no man can foretell.
Even if thirty years hence we may meet
It is worth while, and prison shall be sweet."

He looked at me with pleasure, then he sighed
And said, "Well, you deserve her." Then he stared
Across the quarry, trying to decide
If I were fit to see his spirit bared.
Quick glances of suspicion and distrust
Searched at my face, and then he said, "I must.

" I must not doubt you, lad, so listen now.
I have a plan, myself, for leaving this.
I meant to try to-night; I'll shew you how
To save your lady. And to-night there is
Hope, for the Khalif sleeps at Marrakesh.
When knots are loosened fish can burst the mesh."

So eagerly I plighted faith to try
That very night to help him. "If we fail"
He said, "It will be Fate, who flings the die
Against which nothing mortal can avail.
But we are desperate men whose throws succeed,
Being one with Fate, or Change from Passionate Need."

So we agreed, that when the cave was still,
We would attempt, and having broken prison,
Would raid the women's palace on the hill,
And save my lady ere the sun was risen,
Then put to sea towards some hiding-place
North, in the shoals, where galleys could not chase.

Even as we made an end, another slave,
(They called him English Gerard) joined us there.
Often, upon the toppling of a wave
I'd seen him rowing and had heard him swear.
Forceful he was, with promise in his eye
Of rough capacity and liberty.

"Still talking of escape, I'll bet a crown,"
He said to me; "But you are young, my friend,
We oldsters know we cannot leave the town,
We shall be here until the bitter end.
Give up the hope, lad, better let it be,
No slave has ever broken from Saffee.

" Inland, there's desert, westward there's the sea,
Northward the Moorish towns, and in the south
Swamps and the forest to eternity.
The young colt jibs at iron in his mouth
But has to take it, and the fact for us
Is, that we're slaves, and have to linger thus."

"Just what I told him," said Duhamel, "Just,
My very words. It's bitter but the truth.
We shall be slaves until we turn to dust
Your lady, too, until she loses youth.
Put hope aside, and make what life you can
Being a slave, for slave you are, young man."

"Perhaps," said Gerard, "you were told what comes
Of trying to escape, for men have tried.
They only added to their martyrdoms,
Two got away at Christmas, but they died.
The one they skinned and stuffed, the other hangs
Still, near the gate, upon the ganches' fangs."

"How were they caught," I asked. "They were betrayed,"
Said Gerard. "How? By whom? I cannot tell.
They trusted someone with the plans thay made
And he betrayed them, like a fiend from hell.
How do I know it? Well. They left no trace,
And yet the lancers knew their hiding place.

"They went straight to it, straight, and caught them there
As soon as daylight came, when they had gone.
(As you'll be taken if you don't beware)
They keep great hooks to hang the bodies on
Of those who run away, or try, for none
Succeeds, nor can, so you be warned, my son."

He nodded to me, gripped my arm, and went
Back to his place, the other side the cave.
"That was a spy," Duhamel whispered, "sent
To test your spirit as a new-come slave.
I know the man, and if report speaks true
He helped in that betrayal of the two.

"Now seem to sleep and when the cave is quiet
We two will try; they say God helps the mad.
To be a slave to Moors is bitter diet
That poisons men; two bitter years I've had
But before dawn we two will end it, lad.
Now seem to sleep."
I cuddled to the stone;
Yet Gerard's voice seemed calling to my bone.

And opening my eyes, I saw him there
Looking intently at me, and he shook
His head at me, as though to say "Beware",
And frowned a passionate warning in a look.
A wind-flaw, blowing through the window, took
The flame within the lantern, that it shed
Bright light on him. Again he shook his head.

The wind blowing in from the sea made the flame like a plume;
The slaves, huddled close, cursed in whispers, with chattering teeth,
The wolves of their spirits came stealthy to snarl in the gloom
Over bones of their pleasures long-perished: the sea moaned beneath.

And my heart glowed with joy that that night I might rescue my love,
Glowed with joy in Duhamel whose cunning would conquer the guards.
The wind blew in fresher; a sentry went shuffling above,
Some gamblers crouched tense, while a lean hand flickered the cards.

Then one by one the gamblers left their game
The shadows shaken by the blowing flame
Winked on the wall until the lamp blew out.
Wrapping his ankle irons in a clout
(To save his skin) each branded slave prepared
To take his sleep his only comfort spared.

A kind of clearness blowing from the night
Made sleepers' faces bonelike with its light.
A sleeper moaning, twisted with his shoulder
Close to the limestone as the wind grew colder.
Trickles of water glistened down and splashed
Pools on the limestone into rings that flashed.
Often a stirring sleeper struck the bell
Of chain-links upon stones. Deep breathing fell
Like sighing, out of all that misery
Of vermined men who dreamed of being free.
Heavily on the beaches fell the sea.

Then, as the tide came in, the waters seething
Under the quarries, mingled with the breathing,
Until the prison in the rock y-hewen
Seemed like a ship that trod the water's ruin
Trampling the toppling sea, while water creeping
Splashed from the seams in darkness on men sleeping.
Far in the city all the dogs were howling
At that white bird the moon in heaven owling.
Out in the guardhouse soldiers made a dither
About the wiry titter of a zither
Their long-drawn songs were timed with clapping hands.

The water hissed its life out on the sands.
The wheel of heaven with all her glittering turned
The city window-lights no longer burned.
Then one by one the soldiers left their clatter
The moon arose and walked upon the water
The sleepers turned to screen her from their eyes.
A fishing boat sailed past; the fishers' cries
Rang in the darkness of the bay without.
Her sail flapped as she creaked and stood about,
Then eased, then leaned, then strained and stood away.
Deep silence followed, save where breathers lay.

So, lying there, with all my being tense
Prepared to strike, to take my lady thence,
A prompting bade me, not to trust too far
This man Duhamel as a guiding star.
Some little thing in him had jarred on me
A touch (the flesh being raw) hurts cruelly.
And something in his speech or in his bearing
Made me mistrust his steadiness in daring
Or his endurance, or his faith to us.
Some smile or word made me distrustful thus.
Who knows the hidden things within our being
That prompt our brain to safety without seeing,
Hear the unheard and save us without sense?
What fingers touch our strings when we are tense?

Even at that point, Duhamel crept to me,
And whispered, "Come, by morning we'll be free.
Creep down the passage there towards the entry,
See what the guards do while I time the sentry.
I think that all the guards are sleeping sound
But, there's his foot, one sentry goes his round.
And I must time him till I know his beat."
Loitering upon the rampart came the feet
Of some loose-slippered soldier. I could hear
Him halt, humming a tune, grounding his spear.

I listened, while Duhamel urged me on.
"Hurry," he said, "the night will soon be gone;
Watch from the passage what the guards are doing:
I'll time the sentry. There'll be no pursuing
If we can pass the guards with him away.
Beyond the bend he cannot see the bay,"

"No," I replied, "yet even if the guard
Be all asleep, it cannot but be hard
For us to pick the lock of that steel grille
Without their waking. We cannot be still
Crouched in the puddle, scraping at the lock.
The guards will wake and kill us at a knock."

"Hush," said Duhamel, "Let me whisper close.
I did not dare before for fear of those,
(The rowers and the spies), I have a key
That will unlock the grating silently,
Making no noise at all in catch or ward.
Now creep along and spy upon the guard."

"A key?" said I. My first suspicions died.
"Yes," said the man, "I slipped it from his side,
While he was checking us this afternoon.
Courage, my son, she'll be in safety soon."
He shewed a key, and urged me to be gone
Down the gaunt gashway carven in the stone,
A darkness in the else half-glimmering lime,
Where drops, each minute splashing, told the time.
There, in the darkness somewhere, lay the gate
Where courage and the moment might make Fate.

I rose, half-doubting, upon hands and knees;
The blood within my temples sang like bees;
I heard my heart. I saw Duhamel's face,
Dark eyes in focus in a whitish space,
Watching me close. I doubted, even then.
Then with the impulse which transfigures men,
Doubt, hesitation, terror passed. I crawled
Into the dripping tunnel limestone-walled.

A cold drop spattered on my neck; the wet
Struck chilly where my hands and knees were set.
I crawled into a darkness like a vault
Glimmering and sweating like a rock of salt.

I crept most thief-like till the passage turned.
There, in a barrèd greyness, I discerned
The world without, shut from me by the grille.
I stopped, most thief-like, listening.

All was still;
The quarry I had left was still as stone.
The melancholy water-drip alone
Broke silence near me, and ahead the night
Was silent in the beauty of its light,
Across which fell the black of prison bars.

I crawled ten paces more and saw the stars
Above the guard-hut in the quarry pit:
The hut was still, it had no lantern lit.
I crawled again with every nerve intent.

The cleanly sea-wind bringing pleasant scent
Blew through the grille with little specks of sand.
Each second I expected the word "Stand."
That, or a shot, but still, no challenge came.
The twilight of the moon's unearthly flame
Burned steadily; the palm-leaves on the hut
Rustled in gusts, the crazy door was shut.
The guards were either sleeping or not there.

I peered out through the grille and drank the air
For any scent that might betray a guard
Hidden in ambush near me keeping ward;
But no scent, save the cleanness of the sea,
Blew on the night wind blowing in on me.
There was no trace of man.

I watched and listened
The water dropped, the trickling passage glistened,
The coldness of the iron pressed my brow.

Then, as I listened, (I can hear it now),
A strangled cry such as a dreamer cries
When the dream binds him that he cannot rise,
Gurgled behind me in the sleepers' cave.
A failing hand that struggled with the grave
Beat on the floor, then fluttered, then relaxed,
Limp as an altar ox a priest has axed.
No need to say that someone had been killed
That was no dream.

Yet all the cave was stilled.
Nobody spoke, or called, or ran to aid.
The fingers of the palm leaves ticked and played
On the hut-roof, but yet no guard appeared.
I started to crawl back, because I feared.
I knew that someone must have heard that calling
Of the killed blood upon the midnight falling.
"I shall be judged the killer," so I thought.

So crawling swiftly back like one distraught,
I groped that tunnel where the blackness made
Me feel each inch before my hand was laid.
There was no gleam, save wetness on the wall,
No noise but heart beat or the dropping's fall.
Blackness and silence tense with murder done,
Tense with a soul that had not yet begun
To know the world without the help of clay.
I was in terror in that inky way.

Then suddenly, while stretching out my hand
The terror brought my heart's blood to a stand.
I touched a man.

His face was turned to me.
He whispered, "To the grille. I have the key."
So, without speech I turned; he followed after.
I trembled at the droppings from the rafter.
Each noise without seemed footsteps in pursuit.
The palm-leaves fluttered like a running foot.
The moonlight held her lantern to betray us.
A stricken stone was as a sword to slay us.
Then at the grille we paused that I could see
That it was not Duhamel there with me
But English Gerard.

"Do not speak," he said;
" Don't think about Duhamel; he is dead.
This key, that should unlock, is sticking: try."
With shaking hands I took the clicket, I.
A lean cogged bolt of iron jangled bright
By shaking in the key-ring, day and night;
It stuck in the knobbed latch and would not lift.

All kinds of terror urged me to be swift,
Fear of the guards and of the darkness dying,
And of Duhamel's body mutely crying
The thin red cry of murdered blood and bone
Piping in darkness to make murder known.
But there the clicket jammed the iron socket
Nor could my hand withdraw it or unlock it.
"Let me," said Gerard; then with guile and skill
He coaxed the knobbed iron from the grille
"It does not fit," he muttered; "after all."

Outside, within his roost, a cock did call
His warning to the ghosts, and slept again,
The stars that glittered in the sky like grain
Seemed paler, and the ticking time sped on
To the guard's waking and the darkness gone
With nothing done.

Then Gerard turned to me
"Though this is wrong, Duhamel had the key,
And has it still about him as I guess
Tied to his flesh or hidden in his dress.
Wait here, while I go rummage through his clothes."

A sleeper, tossing, jabbered broken oaths
Then slept, while Gerard crawled.
I was alone
Afraid no more, but anxious to the bone.

And looking out I saw a sentry come
Slowly towards the grille. I cowered numb
Back into blackness pressed against the wall.
I heard the measure of his footsteps fall
Along the quarry to me. I could see
The tenseness of his eyes turned full on me
I felt that he must see me and give speech.

His hand, that shook the grille, was in my reach.
He peered within to see if all were well.
Wept as though spat a drop of water fell.
He peered into the blackness where I stood,
Then, having tried the lock, he tossed his hood,
Crouched at the grille and struck a light, and lit
Tinder, and blew the glowing end of it
Till all his face was fierce in the strong glow;
He sucked the rank tobacco lighted so,
And stood a moment blowing bitter smoke.
I hardly dared to breathe lest I should choke.
I longed to move, but dared not. Had I stirred
Even a finger's breadth, he must have heard.
He must have touched me had he thrust his hand
Within the grille to touch the wall he scanned.

Then, slowly, muttering to himself, he took
Three steps away, then turned for one more look
Straight at the grille and me. I counted ten.
Something within the passage moved him then
Because he leaned and peered as though unsure.
Then, stepping to the grille-work's embrasure,
He thrust his face against the iron grid,
And stared into the blackness where I hid,
And softly breathed, "Duhamel."

As he spoke
A passing cloud put dimness as of smoke
Over the moon's face. No-one answered him,
A drip-drop spat its wetness in the dim.
He paused to call again, then turned away.
He wandered slowly up the quarry way
But at the bend he stopped to rest his bones.

He sat upon the bank and juggled stones
For long long minutes. Gerard joined me there
We watched the sentry tossing stones in air
To catch them on his hand's back as they fell.
We wished him in the bottom pit of hell.
At last he rose and sauntered round the bend.
The falling of his footsteps had an end
At last, and Gerard spoke, "I have the key."

The cogs caught in the locket clickily,
The catch fell back, the heavy iron gave.
We pushed the grille and stept out of the grave
Into the moonlight where the wind was blowing.
"Hurry," I whispered, for the cocks were crowing
In unseen roosts, the morning being near.
We climbed the bank.
"This way," said Gerard, "here.

Now, down the slope. We dodge the sentry so.
Now through the water where the withies grow.
Now we are out of sight; now we can talk."
We changed our crouching running to a walk.

He led me up a slope where rats carousing
Squealed or showed teeth among the tumbled housing,
Half ruined wooden huts, or lime-washed clay.
We turned from this into a trodden way
Pale in the moonlight, where the dogs that prowled
Snarled as we passed, then eyed the moon and howled.

Below us, to our right, the harbour gleamed,
In front, pale with the moon, the city dreamed,
Roof upon roof, with pointing fingers white,
The minarets, frost-fretted with the light,
With many a bubbled dome-top like a shell
Covering the hillside to the citadel.

"There, to the left," said Gerard, "where the trees are,
That whiteness is the palace of the Caesar,
His gardens and his fishpools. That long building
Flanked by the domes that glitter so with gilding
Is where the women are. She will be there.
But courage, comrade, never yield to care,
We'll set her free, before the morning breaks.
But oh, my son, no more of your mistakes.
What made you trust Duhamel as you did?
Well, he is dead. The world is better rid
Of men like him. He tempted and betrayed
Those two poor souls last year.
Ah, when he bade
You go to watch the guard I studied him.
He was a bitter viper, supple — slim.
When he had judged that you had reached the entry,
He stole towards the grate and called the sentry,
'Hussein, Hussein —' but Hussein never heard.
He called him twice, but never called the third
I stopped his calling, luckily for you."

"Yes, but" (I said), "what did he mean to do,
Calling the sentry? What could that have done?"
"Caught you in trying to escape, my son,
The thing they love to do from time to time.
They reckon that examples stop the crime.
One caught and skinned makes many fear to try.
They would have flayed your skin off cruelly
In face of all these slaves, to daunt them down.
Then you'd have hung a dying in the town
Nailed to some post, two days, perhaps, or three,
With thirst and flies.

But let Duhamel be,
Bad though he was, misfortune tempts a soul
Worse than we think, and few men can control
Their virtue, being slave; and he had been
A Knight of France, a courtier of the Queen.
He must have suffered to have fallen so,
A slave, a spy on slaves; we cannot know
Thank God, what power of sinking lies in us.
God keep us all."

So talking to me thus,
He turned me leftward from the citadel
Uphill. He said, "I know this city well,
There is the Khalif's palace straight ahead.
How many days I've staggered nearly dead
From thirst, and from the sun, and from the load,
Up to the palace-gates along this road,
Bearing the plunder of the cruise to store,
After a month of tugging at the oar,
But now, please God, I shall not come again."

Our talking stopped; we turned into a lane.
High, white-washed walls rose up on either side,
The narrow gash between was four feet wide,
And there at sprawl within the narrow way
With head in hood a sleeping beggar lay.
We stepped across his body heedfully
Deep in his dream he muttered drowsily.

We tip-toed on. The wall-tops, high above,
White in the quiet moonlight, hid my love.
We crept like worms in darkness yard by yard,
Still as the dead, but that our hearts beat hard.
And, spite of self, my teeth clickt from the flood
Of quick excitement running in my blood.
We were so near her, and the peril came
Close, with the moment that would prove the same.

The lane turned sharply twice. In shadow dark,
With shiverings of singing like a lark,
A fountain sprang, relented, sprinkled, bubbled,
In some cool garden that the moonlight troubled,
Unseen by us, although a smell of roses
Warm on the wind, stole to us from its closes.
Then came a wood-smoke smell, and mixed therewith
Gums from the heart's blood of the sinnam's pith.
And Gerard touched me. We had reached the place.
The woman's palace-wall was there in face
The garden-wall merged with it, moonlight-topped,
Just where the two together merged we stopped.

Then, as we stood there, breathing, we could hear,
Beyond the wall, some footsteps loitering near,
Some garden sentry slowly paced his watch
Crooning a love song; I could smell the match
That smouldered in the linstock at his hand.

His footsteps passed away upon the sand
Slowly, with pauses, for he stopped to eat
The green buds of the staric on his beat.
When he had gone, a cock crowed in the lane.
"It will be morning when he crows again,"
Was in our thoughts: we had full little time.

Some joist-holes gave us foothold, we could climb
Without much trouble to the wall's flat top,
There we lay still, to let the plaster drop,
And see what dangers lay below us there.

The garden of the palace breathed sweet air
Under our perch, the fountain's leaping glitter
Shone; a bird started with a frightened twitter.
Alleys of blossomed fruit trees girt a cool
White marble screen about a bathing pool,
The palace rose beyond among its trees,
Splay-fronded figs and dates and cypresses.

Close to our left hands was the Woman's House.
We crept along our wall-top perilous
Till we could touch the roof that hid my love
A teaken joist-end jutted out above.
We swung ourselves upon the roof thereby.

The dewy wet flat house-top faced the sky.
We crouched together there.
Sweet smoke was wreathing
Out of a trap-door near us; heavy breathing
Came from a woman sleeping near the trap.
I crept to her, not knowing what might hap.
She was an old Moor woman with primmed lips,
And foul white hair, and hennaed finger tips
That clutched a dark hair blanket to her chin.

I crept to the trap-door and peered within.
A ladder led within. A lantern burning
Shewed us a passage leading to a turning
But open to the garden at one end.

Even as we peered, a man came round the bend,
Walked slowly down that lamp-lit corridor,
And stood to watch the garden at the door.
We saw his back within that moonlit square.
He had a curving sword which glittered bare.
He stood three minutes still, watching the night,
Each beating second made the east more light.
He cracked and relished nuts or melon seeds.

The hoof-sparks of the morning's running steeds
Made a pale dust now in the distant east
But still the man stood cracking at his feast
Nut after nut; Then flinging broken shell
Into the rose-walk, clicking as it fell,
He turned towards us up the passage dim.
There at the trap we crouched right over him,
And as he passed beneath, his fingers tried
A door below us in the passage-side.
Then, slowly loitering on, he reached and passed
The passage turning; he was gone at last
His footsteps died away; they struck on stone
In some far cloister; we were left alone.

Then, while our leaping hearts beat like to drums
We took the gambler's way, that takes what comes.
We slid into the trap and down the stair,
Steep, like a loft's; eleven rungs there were.
We stood within the passage at the door
Tried by the guard that little while before.

Within, there was a rustling and a chinking,
(Like the glass dangles that the wind sets clinking)
And something tense there was within; the throbbing
Of hearts in a despair too deep for sobbing
We felt it there before we pressed the latch.

The teaken bar rose stiffly from its catch.
We slipt within and closed the door again.
We were within the dwelling place of pain,
Among the women whom the Moors had taken,
The broken-hearts, despairing and forsaken.
The desolate that cried where no man heard.

Nobody challenged, but some women stirred.
It was so dark at first, after the moon.
A smoking censer, swinging, creaked a croon,
There was a hanging lamp of beaten brass
That gave dim light through scraps of coloured glass
I saw a long low room with many a heap
Dark, on the floor, where women lay asleep
On silken cushions. Round the wall there ran
(Dark, too, with cushioned women) a divan,
And women stirred and little chains were shaken.

What horror 'tis, to prisoners, to waken
Out of the dreams of home back to the chain,
Back to the iron and the mill again,
In some far land among one's enemies.
I knew that then; those women made me wise.

We stared into the twilight till our eyes
Could see more clearly: no one challenged us.
But standing back against the doorway thus,
I saw the warden of the room, asleep,
Close to me, on the cushions, breathing deep,
Her hard face made like iron by the gloom.
An old grim Moor that warden of the room,
A human iron fettered on the poor.
Far down the room a fetter touched the floor.

Even in the gloom I knew that she was there,
My April of a woman with bright hair;
She sat upright against the wall alone
By burning meditation turned to stone,
Staring ahead and when I touched her shoulder
Her body (stiffened like a corpse and colder)
Seemed not herself, her mind seemed far away.

There was no need to talk, but to essay
The light steel chain that linked her to the wall.
We gripped it, heaving, till its links were gall
Biting across our hands, but still we drave
She, I and Gerard heaving till it gave
The leaded staple snapped across the shank.

The loosed chain struck the flooring with a clank.
We all lay still, my arm about my own.
"Who's moving there? Be silent," snapped the crone.

Cross with the slave who had awakened her
She stared towards us. We could hear her stir,
Craning towards us, but she could not see
More than the cushions tumbled there with me.
She thought, perhaps, "That fair one shook her chain."
She growled, "I'll beat you, if you stir again.
A Moorish whip upon your Christian skin."

I saw her clutch her blanket to her chin
Turn to her side and settle to her rest.
The dawn, that brings the skylark from her nest
Was flying with bright feet that ever hasted.
Each moment there meant happy chances wasted,
Yet still we had to stay until she slept.

When she had fallen to a doze we crept
Stealthily to the door on hands and knees.
All of those women came from over seas.
We could not waken them to share our chance.
Not Peru's silver nor the fields of France
Could buy a place in our society.
One tender feeling might have made us die
All three, and been no kindness to the fourth:
Compassions perish when the wind is north.

Close to the door, a woman leaned and caught
My darling's hand and kissed it swift as thought
And whispered, "O, good luck," and then was still.
She had no luck, but O she had good will.
We blest her in our hearts.
The warder stirred
Growling but dozing lightly, then we heard
Outside the door, within three feet of us,
The footsteps of the sentry perilous,
The clinking of his scabbard lightly touching
Some metal button, then his fingers clutching
The teaken catch to try if it were home.

We stood stone-still expecting him to come.
He did not come, he pushed the door and passed,
Treading this beat exactly like the last,
To loiter at the door to crack and spit.

The time dragged by till he had done with it.
Then back he came, and once again he shook
The catch upon its socket, then he took
His way along the passage out of hearing.

The room 'gan glimmer from the dawning nearing
The warder struggled with a dream and cried
The lamp-flame purred from want of oil and died.
And she, the woman who had kissed her hand,
Whispered, "O go, for God's sake, do not stand
One moment more, but go. God help you free."

We crept out of the prison silently,
Gerard the last, who closed the door behind us,
The crowing of a cock came to remind us
That it was morning now with daylight breaking
The leaves all shivering and birds awaking.
We climbed the ladder.

Its eleven rungs
Called to the Moors of us with all their tongues.
"Wake," "Wake;" "They fly." "The three of them are
flying."
"O broken house," "O sleepers, thieves are trying
To take the Khalif's treasure." "Guards," "Awake."
"They rob the women." "For the prophet's sake."
"Slaughter these Christians." Thus the ladder spoke
Three times aloud yet nobody awoke
Even the hag upon the roof was still.

Now the red cock of dawning triumphed shrill
And little ends of landwind shook the leaves.
White through the cypress gleamed the palace eaves.
The dim and dewy beauty of the blossom,
Shy with the daybreak, trembled in its bosom,
Some snowy petals loitered to the ground.
The city houses had a wakening sound
Some smoke was rising, and we heard the stirs
Made at the gates by country marketers;
Only a moment's twilight yet remained.

The supple links that held my darling chained
Served as a rope to help her down the wall.
Our hearts stood still to hear the plaster fall
But down we scrambled safely to the lane.
We heard the hag upon the roof complain
She called strange names and listened for reply.
We heard her tread the ladder heavily
It was her rising time, perhaps, we thought.

And now the dangers that the daylight brought
Came thick upon us; for our foreign dress
Betrayed us at each step beyond a guess,
Even to be seen was certain death to us.
We hid my darling's face, and hasting thus
Kept up the narrow lane as Gerard bade.
He said, "Beyond, the city wall is laid
Heaped in the ditch and we can cross it there.
It fell from rottenness and dis-repair.
They set no guard there — or they did not set.
They will not notice us, and we can get
Out to the tombs and hide inside a vault."

In overbrimming beauty without fault
The sun brought colour to that dingy hive.
It made the black tree green, the sea alive,
The huts like palaces, but us who fled
Like ghosts at cockcrow hasting to the dead.

The lane had ceased. We reached an open space,
The greenish slope, the horses' baiting place,
Between the city and the palace wall.
The hill dipped sharply in a steepish fall
Down to the houses, and the grass was worn
With hoofs, and littered with the husks of corn.
"Now, slowly," Gerard said, " for Moors go slowly."

There trembling in its blueness dim and holy
Lay the great water bursting on the Mole
Her tremblings came as thoughts come in a soul.
There was our peace, there was the road to home,
That never trodden trembling bright with foam.
"There lies the road," said Gerard, "now, come on."

The high leaves in the trees above us shone,
For now the sun had climbed the eastern hill,
The coldness of the dawn was with us still.
We walked along the grass towards an alley
Between high walls beyond a tiny valley.

Fronting this alley's mouth our sloping grass
Dipped down and up, a little gut there was
Down which we slithered and from which we climbed.

And just as we emerged, exactly timed,
Just as we drew my darling to the top,
There came a noise that made our pulses stop.

For down towards us, blocking all the road,
Their horses striking sparks out as they strode,
Came lancers clattering with their hands held high,
Their knees bent up, and many a sharp quick cry;
The pennons in their lance heads flapped like flame.

Three ranks in twos and then a swordsman came,
Then one who held a scarlet banner; then
One in a scarlet cloak, a King of men.

It was the Khalif's self, returning home,
His rein had smeared his stallion's crest with foam,
I noticed that. He was not twenty yards
From us. He saw us.

At a sign his guards
Rode round us; bade us stand; there was no hope.

"Our luck," said Gerard. Then they took a rope
And hitched our wrists together. Then they led
The three of us down-hearted like the dead
Before the Khalif's self. The swordsman bared
His right arm to the shoulder and prepared.

The Khalif stared at us, and we at him
We were defiant at him, he was grim.
A hawk-like fellow, like a bird of prey,
A hawk to strike, a swift to get away.
His clean brown face (with blood beneath the brown),
Puckered, his thin lips tightened in a frown,
He knew without our telling, what we were.

The swordsman looked for word to kill us there.

I saw the lancers' glances at their chief.
Death on the instant would have seemed relief
To that not knowing what her fate would be
After the sword had made an end of me.

The Khalif's face grew grimmer; then he said
"Bring them with us." The swordsman sheathed his blade.

They took us to the palace, to a chamber
Smelling of bruisèd spice and burning amber,
There slaves were sent to fetch the newly risen
Servants and warders of the woman's prison.
The white of death was on them when they came.

The Khalif lightened on them with quick flame.
Harsh though she was, I sorrowed for the crone,
For she was old, a woman, and alone,
And came, in age, upon disgrace through me;
I know not what disgrace, I did not see
Those crones again, I doubt not they were whipt
For letting us escape them while they slept.
Perhaps they killed the sentry. Who can tell?
The devil ever keeps the laws in hell.

They dragged them out to justice one by one.
However bitter was the justice done
I doubt not they were thankful to be quit
(At cost of some few pangs) the fear of it.
Then our turn came.

The Khalif's fury raged
Because our eyes had seen those women caged,
Because our Christian presence had defiled
The Woman's House and somehow had beguiled
A woman-slave, his victim, out of it,
Against all Moorish law and Holy Writ
If we had killed his son it had been less.

He rose up in his place and rent his dress
"Let them be ganched upon the hooks," he cried,
"Throughout to-day, but not till they have died.
Then gather all the slaves, and flay these three
Alive, before them, that the slaves may see
What comes to dogs who try to get away.
So, ganch the three."

Then Gerard answered, "Stay.
Before you fling us to the hooks, hear this.
There are two laws, and men may go amiss
Either by breaking or by keeping one.
There is man's law by which man's work is done.
Your galleys rowed, your palace kept in state
Your victims ganched or headed on the gate
And accident has bent us to its yoke.

" We break it: death: but it is better broke.

" You know, you Khalif, by what death you reign,
What force of fraud, what cruelty of pain,
What spies and prostitutes support your power,
And help your law to run its little hour,
We, who are but ourselves, defy it all.

" We were free people till you made us thrall
I was a sailor whom you took at sea
While sailing home. This woman that you see
You broke upon with murder in the night
To drag her here to die for your delight,
This young man is her lover.
When he knew
That she was taken by your pirate crew
He followed her to save her, or at least
Be near her in her grief. Man is a beast
And women are his pasture by your law.
This young man was in safety, but he saw
His darling taken to the slave-girls' pen
Of weeping in the night and beasts of men.
He gave up everything, risked everything,
Came to your galley, took the iron ring,
Rowed at the bitter oar-loom as a slave,
Only for love of her, for hope to save
Her from one bruise of all the many bruises
That fall upon a woman when she loses
Those whom your gang of bloodhounds made her lose.

" Knowing another law we could not choose
But stamp your law beneath our feet as dust,
Its bloodshed and its rapine and its lust,
For one clean hour of struggle to be free;
She for her passionate pride of chastity,
He for his love of her, and I because
I'm not too old to glory in the cause
Of generous souls who have harsh measure meted.

" We did the generous thing and are defeated.
Boast, then, to-night, when you have drunken deep,
Between the singing woman's song and sleep,
That you have tortured to the death three slaves
Who spat upon your law and found their graves
Helping each other in the generous thing.
No mighty triumph for a boast, O King."

Then he was silent while the Khalif stared.
Never before had any being dared
To speak thus to him. All the courtiers paled.
We, who had died, expected to be haled
To torture there and then before the crowd.
It was so silent that the wind seemed loud
Clicking a loose slat in the open shutter.
I heard the distant breakers at their mutter
Upon the Mole, I saw my darling's face
Steady and proud; a breathing filled the place,
Men drawing breath until the Khalif spoke.

His torn dress hung upon him like a cloak
He spoke at last. "You speak of law," he said.
"By climates and by soils the laws are made.
Ours is a hawk-law suited to the land,
This rock of hawks or eyrie among sand,
I am a hawk, the hawk law pleases me.

" But I am man, and, being man, can be
Moved, sometimes, Christian, by the law which makes
Men who are suffering from man's mistakes,
Brothers sometimes.
I had not heard this tale
Of you, the lover, following to jail
The woman whom you loved. You bowed your neck
Into the iron fettered to the deck,
And followed her to prison, all for love?

" Allah, who gives men courage from above,
Has surely blessed you, boy.

" And you, his queen;
Without your love his courage had not been.
Your beauty and your truth prevailed on him.
Allah has blessed you, too.

" And you, the grim
Killer of men at midnight, you who speak
To Kings as peers with colour in your cheek,
Allah made you a man who helps his friends.

" God made you all. I will not thwart his ends
You shall be free.
Hear all. These folk are free.
You Emir, fit a xebec for the sea
To let them sail at noon.
Go where you will.
And lest my rovers should molest you still,
Here is my seal that they shall let you pass."

Throughout the room a sudden murmur was
A gasp of indrawn breath and shifting feet.
So life was given back, the thing so sweet
The undrunk cup that we were longing for.

My darling spoke, "O Khalif, one gift more.
After this bounty that our hearts shall praise
At all our praying-times by nights and days
I ask yet more, O raiser from the dead.
There in your woman's prison as we fled
A hopeless woman blessed us. It is said
That blessings from the broken truly bless.
Khalif, we would not leave in hopelessness
One whose great heart could bless us even then
Even as we left her in the prison pen.
She wished us fortune from a broken heart.
Let her come with us, Khalif, when we start."
"Go, you," the Khalif said, "and choose her forth."

At noon the wind was blowing to the north,
A swift felucca with a scarlet sail
Was ready for us, deep with many a bale,
Of gold and spice and silk, the great King's gifts.
The banners of the King were on her lifts.
The King and all his court rode down to see
Us four glad souls put seawards from Saffee.

In the last glowing of the sunset's gold
We looked our last upon that pirate hold;
The palace gilding shone awhile like fire,
We were at sea with all our heart's desire
Beauty and friendship and the dream fulfilled.
The golden answer to the deeply willed.
The purely longed for, hardly tried for thing.
Into the dark our sea boat dipped her wing
Polaris climbed out of the dark and shone,
Then came the moon, and now Saffee was gone
With all hell's darkness hidden by the sea.

O beautiful is love and to be free
Is beautiful, and beautiful are friends.
Love, freedom, comrades, surely make amends
For all these thorns through which we walk to death.
God let us breathe your beauty with our breath.

All early in the Maytime when daylight comes at four,
We blessed the hawthorn blossom that welcomed us ashore,
O beautiful in this living that passes like the foam
It is to go with sorrow yet come with beauty home.

# THE HOUNDS OF HELL

ABOUT the crowing of the cock,
When the shepherds feel the cold,
A horse's hoofs went clip-a-clock
Along the Hangman's wold.

The horse-hoofs trotted on the stone,
The hoof-sparks glittered by,
And then a hunting horn was blown
And hounds broke into cry.

There was a strangeness in the horn,
A wildness in the cry,
A power of devilry forlorn
Exulting bloodily.

A power of night that ran a prey
Along the hangman's hill.
The shepherds heard the spent buck bray
And the horn blow for the kill.

They heard the worrying of the hounds
About the dead beast's bones;
Then came the horn, and then the sounds
Of horse-hoofs treading stones.

"What hounds are these, that hunt the night?"
The shepherds asked in fear:
"Look, there are calkins clinking bright;
They must be coming here."

The calkins clinkered to a spark,
  The hunter called the pack;
The sheep-dogs' fells all bristled stark
  And all their lips went back.

"Lord God," the shepherds said, "They come;
  And see what hounds he has;
All dripping bluish fire, and dumb,
  And nosing to the grass.

"And trotting scatheless through the gorse,
  And bristling in the fell:
Lord, it is death upon the horse,
  And they're the hounds of hell!"

They shook to watch them as they sped,
  All black against the sky;
A horseman with a hooded head
  And great hounds padding by.

When daylight drove away the dark
  And larks went up and thrilled,
The shepherds climbed the wold to mark
  What beast the hounds had killed.

They came to where the hounds had fed,
  And in that trampled place
They found a pedlar lying dead
  With horror in his face.

There was a farmer on the wold
  Where all the brooks begin,
He had a thousand sheep from fold
  Out grazing on the whin.

The next night, as he lay in bed
  He heard a canterer come
Trampling the wold-top with a tread
  That sounded like a drum.

He thought it was a post that rode,
  So turned him to his sleep,
But the canterer in his dreams abode
  Like horse-hoofs running sheep.

And in his dreams a horn was blown
  And feathering hounds replied,
And all his wethers stood like stone
  In rank on the hillside.

Then, while he struggled still with dreams,
  He saw his wethers run
Before a pack cheered on with screams,
  The thousand sheep as one.

So, leaping from his bed in fear,
  He flung the window back,
And he heard a death-horn blowing clear
  And the crying of a pack.

And the thundering of a thousand sheep,
  All mad and running wild
To the stone-pit seven fathoms deep,
  Whence all the town is tiled.

After them came the hounds of hell
  With hell's own fury filled;
Into the pit the wethers fell
  And all but three were killed.

The hunter blew his horn a note
  And laughed against the moon;
The farmer's breath caught in his throat,
  He fell into a swoon.

The next night when the watch was set
  A heavy rain came down,
The leaden gutters dripped with wet
  Into the shuttered town.

So close the shutters were, the chink
  Of lamplight scarcely showed;
The men at fireside heard no clink
  Of horse-hoofs on the road.

They heard the creaking hinge complain
  And the mouse that gnawed the floor,
And the limping footsteps of the rain
  On the stone outside the door.

And on the wold the rain came down
  Till trickles streakt the grass:
A traveller riding to the town
  Drew rein to let it pass.

The wind sighed in the fir-tree tops,
  The trickles sobb'd in the grass,
The branches ran with showers of drops;
  No other noise there was.

Till up the wold the traveller heard
  A horn blow faint and thin;
He thought it was the curlew bird
  Lamenting to the whin;

And when the far horn blew again,
  He thought an owl hallooed,
Or a rabbit gave a shriek of pain
  As the stoat leapt in the wood.

But when the horn blew next, it blew
  A trump that split the air,
And hounds gave cry to an Halloo —
  The hunt of hell was there.

"Black," (said the traveller), "black and swift,
  Those running devils came;
Scoring to cry with hackles stifft,
  And grin-jowls dripping flame."

They settled to the sightless scent,
  And up the hill a cry
Told where the frightened quarry went,
  Well knowing it would die.

Then presently a cry rang out,
  And a mort blew for the kill;
A shepherd with his throat torn out
  Lay dead upon the hill.

When this was known, the shepherds drove
  Their flocks into the town;
No man, for money or for love,
  Would watch them on the down.

But night by night the terror ran,
  The townsmen heard them still;
Nightly the hell-hounds hunted man
  And the hunter whooped the kill.

The men who lived upon the moor
  Would waken to the scratch
Of hounds' claws digging at the door.
  Or scraping at the latch.

And presently no man would go
  Without doors after dark,
Lest hell's black hunting horn should blow,
  And hell's black bloodhounds mark.

They shivered round the fire at home,
  While out upon the bent
The hounds with black jowls dropping foam
  Went nosing to the scent.

Men let the hay crop run to seed,
  And the corn crop sprout in ear,
And the root crop choke itself in weed
  That hell-hound hunting year.

Empty to heaven lay the wold,
  Village and church grew green,
The courtyard flagstones spread with mould,
  And weeds sprang up between.

And sometimes when the cock had crowed,
  And the hillside stood out grey,
Men saw them slinking up the road,
  All sullen from their prey.

A hooded horseman on a black,
  With nine black hounds at heel,
After the hell-hunt going back
  All bloody from their meal.

And in men's minds a fear began
  That hell had over-hurled
The guardians of the soul of man
  And come to rule the world.

With bitterness of heart by day,
  And terror in the night,
And the blindness of a barren way
  And withering of delight.

St. Withiel lived upon the moor,
  Where the peat-men live in holes;
He worked among the peat-men poor,
  Who only have their souls.

He brought them nothing but his love
  And the will to do them good,
But power filled him from above,
  His very touch was food.

Men told St. Withiel of the hounds
  And how they killed their prey.
He thought them far beyond his bounds,
  So many miles away.

Then one whose son the hounds had killed
  Told him the tale at length;
St. Withiel pondered why God willed
  That hell should have such strength.

Then one, a passing traveller, told
  How, since the hounds had come,
The church was empty on the wold,
  And all the priests were dumb.

St. Withiel rose at this, and said,
  "This priest will not be dumb;
My spirit will not be afraid
  Though all hell's devils come."

He took his stick and out he went,
  The long way to the wold,
Where the sheep-bells clink upon the bent
  And every wind is cold.

He past the rivers running red
  And the mountains standing bare;
At last the wold-land lay ahead,
  Un-yellowed by the share.

All in the brown October time
  He clambered to the weald;
The plum lay purpled into slime,
  The harvest lay in field.

Trampled by many-footed rain,
  The sun-burnt corn lay dead;
The myriad finches in the grain
  Rose bothering at his tread.

The myriad finches took a sheer
  And settled back to food:
A man was not a thing to fear
  In such a solitude.

The hurrying of their wings died out,
  A silence took the hill;
There was no dog, no bell, no shout,
  The windmill's sails were still.

The gate swung creaking on its hasp,
  The pear splashed from the tree,
In the rotting apple's heart the wasp
  Was drunken drowsily.

The grass upon the cart-wheel ruts
  Had made the trackways dim,
The rabbits ate and hopped their scuts,
  They had no fear of him.

The sunset reddened in the west;
  The distant depth of blue
Stretched out and dimmed; to twiggy nest
  The rooks in clamour drew.

The oakwood in his mail of brass
  Bowed his great crest and stood;
The pine-tree saw St. Withiel pass,
  His great bole blushed like blood.

Then tree and wood alike were dim,
  Yet still St. Withiel strode;
The only noise to comfort him
  Were his footsteps on the road.

The crimson in the west was smoked,
  The west-wind heaped the wrack,
Each tree seemed like a murderer cloaked
  To stab him in the back.

Darkness and desolation came
  To dog his footsteps there;
The dead leaves rustling called his name,
  The death-moth brushed his hair.

The murmurings of the wind fell still;
  He stood and stared around:
He was alone upon the hill,
  On devil-haunted ground.

What was the whitish thing which stood
  In front, with one arm raised,
Like death a-grinning in a hood?
  The saint stood still and gazed.

"What are you?" said St. Withiel, "Speak!"
  Not any answer came
But the night-wind making darkness bleak,
  And the leaves that called his name.

A glow shone on the whitish thing,
  It neither stirred nor spoke:
In spite of faith, a shuddering
  Made the good saint to choke.

He struck the whiteness with his staff —
  It was a withered tree:
An owl flew from it with a laugh,
  The darkness shook with glee.

The darkness came all round him close
  And cackled in his ear:
The midnight, full of life none knows,
  Was very full of fear.

The darkness cackled in his heart,
  That things of hell were there,
That the startled rabbit played a part
  And the stoat's leap did prepare —

Prepare the stage of night for blood
  And the mind of night for death,
For a spirit trembling in the mud,
  In an agony for breath.

A terror came upon the saint,
  It stripped his spirit bare;
He was sick body standing faint,
  Cold sweat and stiffened hair.

He took his terror by the throat
  And stamped it underfoot;
Then, far away, the death-horn's note
  Quailed like a screech-owl's hoot.

Still far away that devil's horn
  Its quavering death-note blew,
But the saint could hear the crackling thorn
  That the hounds trod as they drew.

"Lord, it is true," St. Withiel moaned,
  "And the hunt is drawing near;
Devils that Paradise disowned;
  They know that I am here.

"And there, O God, a hound gives tongue,
  And great hounds quarter dim." —
The saint's hands to his body clung,
  He knew they came for him.

Then close at hand the horn was loud,
  Like Peter's cock of old,
For joy that Peter's soul was cowed,
  And Jesus' body sold.

Then terribly the hounds in cry
  Gave answer to the horn;
The saint in terror turned to fly
  Before his flesh was torn.

After his body came the hounds,
  After the hounds the horse;
Their running crackled with the sounds
  Of fire that runs in gorse.

The saint's breath failed, but still they came:
  The hunter cheered them on;
Even as a wind that blows a flame
  In the vigil of St. John.

And as St. Withiel's terror grew
  The crying of the pack
Bayed nearer, as though terror drew
  Those grip teeth to his back.

No hope was in his soul, no stay,
  Nothing but screaming will
To save his terror-stricken clay
  Before the hounds could kill.

The laid corn tripped, the bramble caught,
  He stumbled on the stones,
The thorn that scratched him, to his thought,
  Was hell's teeth at his bones.

His legs seemed bound as in a dream,
  The wet earth held his feet,
He screamed aloud as rabbits scream
  Before the stoat's teeth meet.

A black thing struck him on the brow,
  A blackness loomed and waved;
It was a tree. He caught a bough
  And scrambled up it, saved.

Saved for the moment, as he thought,
  He pressed against the bark:
The hell-hounds missed the thing they sought,
  They quartered in the dark.

They panted underneath the tree,
  They quartered to the call,
The hunter cried, "Yoi doit, go see!"
  His death-horn blew a fall.

Now up, now down, the hell-hounds went
  With soft feet padding wide;
They tried, but could not hit the scent,
  However hard they tried.

Then presently the horn was blown,
  The hounds were called away,
The hoof-beats glittered on the stone
  And trotted on the brae.

The saint gat strength, but with it came
  A horror of his fear,
Anguish at having failed, and shame,
  And sense of judgment near.

Anguish at having left his charge
  And having failed his trust,
At having flung his sword and targe
  To save his body's dust.

He clambered down the saving tree;
  "I am unclean," he cried.
"Christ died upon a tree for me,
  I used a tree to hide.

"The hell hounds bayed about the cross,
  And tore his clothes apart,
But Christ was gold and I am dross,
  And mud is in my heart."

He stood in anguish in the field;
  A little wind blew by,
The dead leaves dropped, the great stars wheeled
  Their squadrons in the sky.

"Lord, I will try again," he said,
  "Though all hell's devils tear.
This time I will not be afraid
  And what is sent I'll dare."

He set his face against the slope
  Until he topped the brae;
Courage had healed his fear, and hope
  Had put his shame away.

And then, far off, a quest-note ran,
  A feathering hound replied:
The hounds still drew the night for man
  Along that countryside.

Then one by one the hell-hounds spoke
  And still the horn made cheer;
Then the full devil-chorus woke
  To fill the saint with fear.

He knew that they were after him
  To hunt him till he fell;
He turned and fled into the dim,
  And after him came hell.

Over the stony wold he went,
  Through thorns and over quags;
The bloodhounds cried upon the scent,
  They ran like rutting stags.

And when the saint looked round, he saw
  Red eyes intently strained,
The bright teeth in the grinning jaw,
  And running shapes that gained.

Uphill, downhill, with failing breath,
  He ran to save his skin,
Like one who knocked the door of death,
  Yet dared not enter in.

Then water gurgled in the night,
  Dark water lay in front,
The saint saw bubbles running bright;
  The huntsman cheered his hunt.

The saint leaped far into the stream
  And struggled to the shore.
The hunt died like an evil dream,
  A strange land lay before.

He waded to a glittering land,
  With brighter light than ours,
The water ran on silver sand
  By yellow water-flowers.

The fishes nosed the stream to rings
  As petals floated by,
The apples were like orbs of kings
  Against a glow of sky.

On cool and steady stalks of green
  The outland flowers grew,
The ghost-flower, silver like a queen,
  The queen-flower streakt with blue.

The king-flower, crimson on his stalk,
  With frettings in his crown,
The peace-flower purple, from the chalk,
  The flower that loves the down.

Lilies like thoughts, roses like words
  In the sweet brain of June;
The bees there, like the stock-dove birds,
  Breathed all the air with croon.

Purple and golden hung the plums.
  Like slaves bowed down with gems
The peach-trees were; sweet-scented gums
  Oozed clammy from their stems.

And birds of every land were there,
  Like flowers that sang and flew;
All beauty that makes singing fair
  That sunny garden knew.

For all together sang with throats
  So tuned, that the intense
Colour and odour pearled the notes
  And passed into the sense.

And as the saint drew near, he heard
  The birds talk, each to each,
The fire-bird to the glory-bird;
  He understood their speech.

One said, "The saint was terrified
  Because the hunters came."
Another said, "The bloodhounds cried
  And all their eyes were flame."

Another said, "No shame to him,
  For mortal men are blind,
They cannot see beyond the grim
  Into the peace behind."

Another sang, "They cannot know,
  Unless we give the clue,
The power that waits in them below
  The thing they are to do."

Another sang: "they never guess
  That deep within them stand
Courage and peace and loveliness,
  Wisdom and skill of hand."

Another sang, "Sing, brothers; come,
  Make beauty in the air;
The saint is shamed with martyrdom
  Beyond his strength to bear.

"Sing, brothers, every bird that flies!"
  They stretcht their throats to sing,
With the sweetness known in Paradise
  When the bells of heaven ring.

"Open the doors, good saint," they cried,
  "Pass deeper to your soul;
There is a spirit in your side
  That hell cannot control.

"Open the doors to let him in,
  That beauty with the sword;
The hounds are silly shapes of sin,
  They shrivel at a word.

"Come, saint!" and as they sang, the air
  Shone with the shapes of flame,
Bird after bright bird glittered there,
  Crying aloud they came.

A rush of brightness and delight,
  White as the snow in drift,
The fire-bird and the glory-bright,
  Most beautiful, most swift.

Sweeping aloft to show the way
  And singing as they flew,
Many and glittering as the spray
  When windy seas are blue.

So cheerily they rushed; so strong
  Their sweep was through the flowers,
The saint was swept into their song
  And gloried in their powers.

He sang, and leaped into the stream
  And struggled to the shore;
The garden faded like a dream,
  A darkness lay before.

Darkness with glimmery light forlorn
  And quavering hounds in quest,
A huntsman blowing on a horn,
  And lost things not at rest.

He saw the huntsman's hood show black
  Against the graying east,
He heard him hollo to the pack
  And horn them to the feast.

He heard the bloodhounds come to cry
  And settle to the scent,
The black horse made the hoof-casts fly,
  The sparks flashed up the bent.

The saint stood still until they came
  Baying to ring him round;
A horse whose flecking foam was flame,
  And hound on yelling hound.

And jaws that dripped with bitter fire
  Snarled at the saint to tear.
Pilled hell-hounds, balder than the geier,
  Leaped round him everywhere.

St. Withiel let the hell-hounds rave.
  He cried, "Now, in this place,
Climb down, you huntsman of the grave,
  And let me see your face.

"Climb down, you huntsman out of hell,
  And show me what you are.
The judge has stricken on the bell,
  Now answer at the bar."

The baying of the hounds fell still,
  Their jaws' salt fire died.
The wind of morning struck in chill
  Along that countryside.

The blackness of the horse was shrunk,
  His sides seemed ribbed and old.
The rider, hooded like a monk,
  Was trembling with the cold.

The rider bowed as though with pain;
  Then clambered down and stood,
The thin thing that the frightened brain
  Had fed with living blood.

"Show me. What are you?" said the saint.
  A hollow murmur spoke.
"This, Lord," it said; a hand moved faint
  And drew aside the cloak.

A Woman Death that palsy shook
  Stood sick and dwindling there;
Her fingers were a bony crook
  And blood was on her hair.

"Stretch out your hands and sign the Cross,"
  Was all St. Withiel said.
The bloodhounds moaned upon the moss,
  The Woman Death obeyed.

Whimpering with pain, she made the sign.
  "Go, devil-hag," said he,
"Beyond all help of bread and wine,
  Beyond all land and sea.

"Into the ice, into the snow,
  Where Death himself is stark.
Out, with your hounds about you, go,
  And perish in the dark."

They dwindled as the mist that fades
  At coming of the sun,
Like rags of stuff that fire abrades,
  They withered and were done.

The cock, that scares the ghost from earth,
  Crowed as they dwindled down;
The red sun, happy in his girth,
  Strode up above the town.

Sweetly above the sunny wold
  The bells of churches rang;
The sheep-bells clinked within the fold,
  And the larks went up and sang.

Sang for the setting free of men
  From devils that destroyed.
The lark, the robin and the wren,
  They joyed and over-joyed.

The chats, that harbour in the whin,
  Their little sweet throats swelled,
The blackbird and the thrush joined in,
  The missel-thrush excelled.

Till round the saint the singing made
  A beauty in the air,
An ecstasy that cannot fade
  But is forever there.

# CAP ON HEAD

## A TALE OF THE O'NEILL

O'NEILL took ship, O'Neill set sail,
And left his wife ashore
In the foursquare castle like a jail
Between the Mull and the Gore.

Many a month he stayed away,
His lady sorrowed long;
She heard the tide come twice a day
And the sea-lark at his song;

She watched the sun go down in the west,
And another day begin,
At nights she made her mate a nest
But no mate came therein.

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One night, a red light burned at sea,
A ship came in to port,
A foot stirred and the horn was blown
Within the outer court.

It was all dark, save up the brae,
The dead moon wore her heel,
The watchman called, "Who's there the day?"
A voice said, "The O'Neill."

The watchman flung the great gate back,
"Come in, Lord, to your own."
O'Neill stood huddled up in black,
Upon the threshold stone.

White as a riser from the dead
  He passed the lintel post.
"God spare us, Lord," the watchman said,
  "I thought you were a ghost.

"I never heard you come ashore,
  And, look your ship is gone.
Are all our fellows dead, my lord,
  That you should come alone?"

O'Neill stood grinning in the porch
  A little breathing space;
The redness blowing from the torch
  Put colour in his face.

"I've left my ship behind," he said,
  "To join the Scotch king's fleet.
I've left my men behind," he said,
  "To haul on her fore-sheet.

"I have come home all alone," he said,
  "In a country ship from sea.
Let my lady know the news," he said,
  "Then open here to me."

Then lights were lit and men gave hail
  And welcomed him ashore;
The wife was glad within that jail
  Between the Mull and the Gore.

O'Neill went swimming in the sea
  And hunting up the glen;
No one could swim or ride as he
  Of all the sons of men.

His wife went happy in the lane,
  And singing in the tower;
The sweet of having him again
  Had ended all the sour.

But Kate, an old crone muttering dark
  About that windy place,
Did not rejoice: she said, "I mark
  O'Neill has fal'n from grace.

"He has been under the dark star
  Since when he went away.
Men think that when they wander far
  The black thing becomes grey.

"He has been dipped in the strange vat
  And dyed with the strange dye,
And then the black thing, what is that
  That dogs him, going by?

"A dog thing, black, goes padding past
  Forever at his heel:
God help us all to peace at last,
  I fear for the O'Neill.

"His teeth show when the Host does come
  To comfort dying men,
And in the chapel he is dumb,
  He never says Amen."

She would not speak with the O'Neill,
  But when he crossed her path
She prayed, as tremblers do that feel
  The devil in his wrath.

And so the Time went by, whose hand
  Upheaves the lives of men,
The cuckoo left his burning land
  To toll along the glen.

So loud the thrushes sang that spring,
  So rich the hawthorn was,
The air was like a living thing
  Between the sky and the grass.

O'Neill's wife bore a little son
  And set him on her knee;
He grew apace to romp and run
  And dabble in the sea.

But one thing strange about the child
  The neighbours noted there:
That, even if the winds were mild,
  His head was never bare.

His father made him wear a cap
  At all times, night and day,
Bound round his forehead with a strap
  To keep the cold away.

And up and down the little lad
  Went singing at his game:
Men marvelled at the grace he had
  To make the wild birds tame.

Men marvelled at the joy he took
  And at the things he said,
And at the beauty of his look,
  This little Cap on Head.

And when the nights were dark between
  The new moon and the old,
And fires were lit, and winds blew keen,
  And old wives' tales were told,

This little son would scramble near
  Beside his mother's place,
To listen to the tale and peer
  With firelight on his face.

O'Neill would gather to the glow
  With great eyes glittering fierce;
Old Kate would shake to see him so
  And cross herself from curse.

It fell about hay-harvest time,
  When the Lammas floods were out,
A ship all green with water-slime
  Stood in and went about,

And anchored off the bight of sand,
  And swam there like a seal,
With a banner of the bloody hand,
  The flag of the O'Neill.

Then there was cheering in the court
  And hurrying to the beach:
"A ship!" they cried, "A ship in port,
  Brought up in Castle Reach.

"It is our ship. They are our men
  There, coiling up the sheet;
It is our ship come home agen
  From out the Scotch King's fleet.

"And who's the noble in the boat
  Comes rowing through the sea?
His colours are the O'Neill coat,
  But what O'Neill is he?"

O'Neill was in his turret tower,
  With writings red and black;
Kate crossed herself to see him glower
  That tide the ship came back.

He looked long at the anchored ship,
  And at the coming boat;
The devil writhelled up his lip,
  And snickered in his throat.

He strode the room and bit his nails,
  He bit his flesh with rage,
As maddened felons do in jails,
  And rats do in a cage.

He looked at Kate, who crossed her breast,
  He heard them cheer below:
He said, "The wicked cannot rest,
  And now I have to go."

They saw him hurry up the green
  And on into the rain;
Beyond the brae he was not seen:
  He was not seen again.

O'Neill's wife went to watch the boat
  Come driving to the sand:
The noble in the O'Neill coat
  Stood up and waved his hand.

"That is O'Neill!" the clansmen cried,
  "Or else his very twin.
How came he to the ship?" they cried.
  "Just now he was within."

"It is O'Neill," the lady said,
  "And that's his ship returned.
A woman's life's a school," she said,
  "Where bitter things are learned."

O'Neill called to her through his tears,
  "The bitter days are past.
I've prayed for this for seven years,
  Now here I am at last."

Then, as the boat's bows cut the strand,
  Among the slipping foam,
He sprang to take his lady's hand,
  He said, "I have come home."

His lady fainted like the dead,
  Beside the slipping sea.
"This is O'Neill," the servants said,
  "What is that other he?"

"Master," they said, "where have you been
  These seven years and more?"
"I've served the Scottish King and Queen,
  Along the Scottish shore."

"Master," they said, "Another came
  So like in voice and face
To you, we thought it was the same,
  And so he took your place.

" These seven years he's ruled us here,
  While you were still at sea,
And that's his son that's coming here:
  Look, Master, that is he."

O'Neill took off the wee boy's cap
  And ruffled through his hair;
He said, "A young tree full of sap,
  A good shoot growing fair."

He turned the hair for men to see
  And swallowed down his tears;
He said, "The gods be good to me,
  The boy has devil's ears."

He took the young child by the heels
  And broke him, head and breast:
The red hand ridded the O'Neills
  That cuckoo in the nest.

O'Neill flung out the little limbs
  To drift about the bay:
"Watch, fellows, if he sinks or swims,"
  Was all they heard him say.

He said, "The wicked cannot rest
  And now I have to go."
He set his ship's head north and west
  And stood into the flow.

The ship went shining like a seal
  And dimmed into the rain —
And no man saw the great O'Neill,
  Nor heard of him again.

# SONNETS

LIKE bones the ruins of the cities stand,
Like skeletons and skulls with ribs and eyes
Strewn in the saltness of the desert sand
Carved with the unread record of Kings' lies.

Once they were strong with soldiers, loud with voices,
The markets clattered as the carts drove through,
Where now the jackal in the moon rejoices
And the still asp draws death along the dew.

There at the gates the market men paid toll
In bronze and silver pennies long worn thin
Wine was a silver penny for a bowl
Women they had there, and the moon and sin.

And looking from his tower the watchman saw
Green fields for miles, the roads, the great king's law.

Now they are gone with all their songs and sins,
Women and men, to dust; their copper penny,
Of living, spent, among these dusty inns;
The glittering One made level with the many.

Their speech is gone, none speaks it, none can read
The pictured writing of their conqueror's march
The dropping plaster of a fading screed
Ceils with its mildews the decaying arch.

The fields are sand, the streets are fallen stones
Nothing is bought or sold there, nothing spoken,
The sand hides all, the wind that blows it moans,
Blowing more sand until the plinth is broken,

Day in, day out, no other utterance falls;
Only the sand, pit-pitting on the walls.

None knows what overthrew that city's pride.
Some say, the spotted pestilence arose
And smote them to the marrow, that they died
Till every pulse was dusty; no man knows.

Some say, that foreign Kings with all their hosts,
Sieged it with mine and tower till it fell
So that the sword shred shrieking flesh from ghosts
Till every street was empty; who can tell?

Some think, that in the fields, or in the pit,
Out of the light, in filth, among the rotten,
Insects like sands in number, swift as wit,
Famined the city dead; it is forgotten.

Only the city's bones stand, gaunt in air,
Pocked by the pitting sandspecks everywhere.

So shall we be; so will our cities lie,
Unknown beneath the grasses of the summer,
Walls without roofs, naves open to the sky,
Doors open to the wind, the only comer.

And men will grub the ruins, eyes will peer,
Fingers will grope for pennies, brains will tire
To chronicle the skills we practised here,
While still we breathed the wind and trod the mire.

O, like the ghost at dawn, scared by the cock,
Let us make haste, to let the spirit dive
Deep in self's sea, until the deeps unlock
The depths and sunken gold of being alive

Till, though our Many pass, a Something stands
Aloft through Time that covers all with sands.

THE PASSING STRANGE

OUT of the earth to rest or range
Perpetual in perpetual change
The unknown passing through the strange.

Water and saltness held together
To tread the dust and stand the weather
And plough the field and stretch the tether.

To pass the wine cup and be witty,
Water the sands and build the city
Slaughter like devils and have pity,

Be red with rage and pale with lust,
Make beauty come, make peace, make trust,
Water and saltness mixed with dust;

Drive over earth, swim under sea,
Fly in the eagle's secrecy,
Guess where the hidden comets be;

Know all the deathy seeds that still
Queen Helen's beauty, Caesar's will,
And slay them even as they kill,

Fashion an altar for a rood,
Defile a continent with blood,
And watch a brother starve for food;

Love like a madman, shaking, blind
Till self is burnt into a kind
Possession of another mind;

Brood upon beauty till the grace
Of beauty with the holy face
Brings peace into the bitter place;

Probe in the lifeless granites, scan
The stars for hope, for guide, for plan;
Live as a woman or a man;

Fasten to lover or to friend
Until the heart break at the end
The break of death that cannot mend

Then to lie useless, helpless, still
Down in the earth, in dark, to fill
The roots of grass or daffodil.

Down in the earth, in dark, alone,
A mockery of the ghost in bone,
The strangeness, passing the unknown.

Time will go by, that outlasts clocks,
Dawn in the thorps will rouse the cocks
Sunset be glory on the rocks

But it, the thing, will never heed
Even the rootling from the seed
Thrusting to suck it for its need.

Since moons decay and suns decline
How else should end this life of mine?
Water and saltness are not wine.

But in the darkest hour of night
When even the foxes peer for sight
The byre-cock crows; he feels the light.

So, in this water mixed with dust,
The byre-cock spirit crows from trust
That death will change because it must,

For all things change, the darkness changes,
The wandering spirits change their ranges,
The corn is gathered to the granges.

The corn is sown again, it grows;
The stars burn out, the darkness goes.
The rhythms change, they do not close.

They change, and we, who pass like foam,
Like dust blown through the streets of Rome,
Change ever, too; we have no home,

Only a beauty, only a power,
Sad in the fruit, bright in the flower,
Endlessly erring for its hour

But gathering, as we stray, a sense
Of Life, so lovely and intense,
It lingers when we wander hence.

That those who follow feel behind
Their backs, when all before is blind,
Our joy, a rampart to the mind.

ANIMULA

THIS is the place, this house beside the sea,
This was the setting where they played their parts
Two men, who knew them all, have talked to me.
Beauty she had, and all had passionate hearts.

I write this in the window where she sat
Two fields, all green with summer, lie below
Then the grey sea, at thought, cloud-coloured, flat,
Wind-dappled from the glen, the tide at flow.

Her portrait and her husband's hang together
One on each side the fire; it is close:
The tree-tops toss; it is a change of weather;
They were most lovely and unhappy, those

That married pair and he who loved too well;
This was the door by which they entered hell.

This, is a drawing of her as a child,
This, is she wed; the faces are the same,
Only, the beauty of the babe is wild;
The woman's beauty has been broken tame.

Witty, bright, gentle, earnest, with great eyes,
Dark hair in heaps, pure colour, lips that smile;
Beauty that is more wisdom than the wise
Lived in this woman for a little while.

Dressed in that beauty that our mothers wore,
(So touching now), she looks out of the frame
With stag-like eyes, that wept till they were sore
Many's the time, till she was broken tame.

Witty, bright, gentle, earnest, even so:
Destiny calls and spirits come and go.

This, is her husband in his youth; and this
Is he in manhood; this, is he in age:
There is a devil in those eyes of his,
A glittering devil, restless in his cage.

A grand man, with a beauty and a pride
A manner and a power and a fire
With beaks of vultures eating at his side
The great brain mad with unfulfilled desire.

"With grand ideas," they say; tall, wicked, proud,
Cold, cruel, bitter, clever, dainty, skilled;
Splendid to see, a head above the crowd,
Splendid with every strength, yet unfulfilled.
Cutting himself (and all those near) with hate
From that sharp mind which should have shaped a state.

And many years ago I saw the third
Bowed in old age and mad with misery
Mad with the bright eyes of the eagle bird;
Burning his heart at fires of memory.

He stood behind a chair and bent and muttered
Grand still, grey, sunburnt, bright with mad eyes brown,
Burning, though dying, like a torch that guttered
That once had lit Queen Helen through the town.

I only saw him once: I saw him go
Leaning uphill his body to the rain
Too good a man for life to punish so
Theirs were the pride and passion, his the pain.

His old coat flapped: the little children turned
To see him pass, that passionate age that burned.

"I knew them well, all three," the old man said;
"He was an unused force and she a child.
She caught him with her beauty, being a maid.
The thought that she had trapped him drove him wild.

He would not work with others, could not rest,
And nothing here could use him or engage him
Yet here he stayed with devils in his breast
To blast the woman who had dared to cage him.

Then, when the scholar came, it made the three,
She turned to him and he, he turned to her.
They both were saints: elopement could not be:
So here they stayed, and passion plied the spur.

Then the men fought, and later she was found
In that green pool beyond the headland, drowned.

They carried her drowned body up the grass
Here to the house, they laid it on the bed
(This very bed, where I have slept, it was)
The scholar begged to see her, being dead.

The husband walked downstairs to see him there
Begging to see her as one asks an alms
He spat at him and cut his cheek-bone bare
"There's pay," he said, "my poet, for your psalms."

And then they fought together at the door
Biting each other, like two dogs, while she
Lay dead, poor woman, dripping on the floor
Out of her hair the death-drops of the sea.
Later, they fought whenever they might meet
In church, or in the fields, or in the street."

Up, on the hill, another aged man
Remembered them. He said, "they were afraid.
They feared to end the passions they began.
They held the cards and yet they never played.

He should have broken from her at all cost.
She should have loved her lover and gone free.
They all held winning cards and yet they lost
So two were wrecked and one drowned in the sea.

Some harshness or some law, or else some fear
Stifled their souls: God help us, when we know
Certainly, certain things, the way is clear.
And yet, they paid, and one respects them, so.

Perhaps they were too fine. I know not, I.
Men must have mercy, being ripe to die."

So this old house of mourning was the stage
(This house and those green fields) for all that woe.
There are her books, her writing on the page,
In those choked beds she made the flowers grow.

Most desolate it is, the rain is pouring
The trees all toss and drip and scatter evil,
The floods are out, the waterfall is roaring,
The bar is mad with many a leaping devil.

And in this house the wind goes whining wild
The door blows open, till I think to see
That delicate sweet woman like a child
Standing with great dark stag's eyes watching me.

Watching as though her sorrow might make plain
(Had I but wit) the meaning of such pain.

I wonder if she sang in this old room.
Ah, never; no; they tell me that she stood
For hours together staring into gloom
Out of the prison bars of flesh and blood.

So, when the ninth wave drowned her, haply she
Wakened, with merging senses, till she blent
Into the joy and colour of the sea
One with the purpose of the element.

And there, perhaps, she cannot feel the woe
Passed in this rotting house, but runs like light
Over the billows where the clippers go,
One with the blue sea's pureness of delight.

Laughing, perhaps, at that old woe of hers
Chained in the cage with fellow prisoners.

He died in that lone cottage near the sea.
In the grey morning when the tide was turning,
The wards of life slipt back and set him free
From cares of meat and dress, from joys and yearning.

Then, like an old man gathering strength, he strayed
Over the beach, and strength came into him
Beauty that never threatened nor betrayed
Made bright the eyes that sorrow had made dim

So that upon that stretch of barren sand
He knew his dreams; he saw her beauty run
With Sorrowful Beauty, laughing, hand in hand,
He heard the trumpets blow in Avalon.

He saw the golden statue stretching down
The wreath, for him, of roses, in a crown.

They say that as her husband lay a-dying
He clamoured for a chain to beat the hound.
They say that all the garden rang with crying
That came out of the air, out of the ground,

Out of the waste that was his soul, may be,
Out of the running wolf-hound of his soul,
That had been kennelled in and now broke free
Out to the moors where stags go, past control.

All through his life his will had kennelled him
Now he was free, and with a hackling fell
He snarled out of the body to the dim
To run the spirits with the hounds of hell.

To run forever at the quarry gone,
The uncaught thing a little further on.

So, one by one, Time took them to his keeping
Those broken lanterns that had held his fire,
Dust went to dust and flesh had time for sleeping,
And soul, the stag, escaped the hound desire.

And now, perhaps, the memory of their hate
Has passed from them and they are friends again
Laughing at all the troubles of this state
Where men and women work each other pain.

And in that wind that runs along the glen
Beating at cottage doors, they may go by,
Exulting now, and helping sorrowing men
To do some little good before they die.

For from these ploughed-up souls the spirit brings
Harvest at last, and sweet from bitter things.

THE LEMMINGS

ONCE in a hundred years the Lemmings come
Westward, in search of food, over the snow,
Westward, until the salt sea drowns them dumb,
Westward, till all are drowned, those Lemmings go.

Once, it is thought, there was a westward land,
(Now drowned) where there was food for those starved things,
And memory of the place has burnt its brand
In the little brains of all the Lemming Kings.

Perhaps, long since, there was a land beyond
Westward from death, some city, some calm place,
Where one could taste God's quiet and be fond
With the little beauty of a human face;

But now the land is drowned, yet still we press
Westward, in search, to death, to nothingness.

FORGET

FORGET all these, the barren fool in power,
The madman in command, the jealous O,
The bitter world biting its bitter hour,
The cruel now, the happy long ago.

Forget all these, for, though they truly hurt,
Even to the soul, they are not lasting things,
Men are no gods; we tread the city dirt,
But in our souls we can be queens and kings.

And I, O Beauty, O divine white wonder,
On whom my dull eyes, blind to all else, peer,
Have you for peace, that not the whole war's thunder
Nor the world's wreck, can threat or take from here.

So you remain, though all man's passionate seas
Roar their blind tides, I can forget all these.

# ON GROWING OLD

BE with me Beauty for the fire is dying,
My dog and I are old, too old for roving,
Man, whose young passion sets the spindrift flying
Is soon too lame to march, too cold for loving.

I take the book and gather to the fire,
Turning old yellow leaves; minute by minute,
The clock ticks to my heart; a withered wire
Moves a thin ghost of music in the spinet.

I cannot sail your seas, I cannot wander,
Your cornland, nor your hill-land nor your valleys,
Ever again, nor share the battle yonder
Where the young knight the broken squadron rallies.

Only stay quiet while my mind remembers
The beauty of fire from the beauty of embers.

Beauty, have pity, for the strong have power
The rich their wealth, the beautiful their grace
Summer of man its sunlight and its flower
Spring time of man all April in a face.

Only, as in the jostling in the Strand,
Where the mob thrusts or loiters or is loud
The beggar with the saucer in his hand
Asks only a penny from the passing crowd,

So, from this glittering world with all its fashion
Its fire and play of men, its stir, its march,
Let me have wisdom, Beauty, wisdom and passion,
Bread to the soul, rain where the summers parch.

Give me but these, and though the darkness close
Even the night will blossom as the rose.

# LYRIC

GIVE me a light that I may see her,
Give me a grace that I may be her,
Give me a clue that I may find her,
Whose beauty shews the brain behind her.
Stars and women and running rivers
And sunny water where a shadow shivers,
And the little brooks that lift the grasses
And April flowers are where she passes.
And all things good and all things kind
Are glimmerings coming from her mind
And in the may a blackbird sings
Against her very heartë springs.

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